

Warren County Veterans Service Officer's Report for January 2013

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HAPPY NEW YEAR COMRADES!

PSA Encourages Women Vets to Use VA: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has developed a nationwide PSA to let women veterans know that they have come to "The Right Place" when seeking health care at VA. The PSA is available on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5FGIZ2uYiU> and at the VA website at: www.womenshealth.va.gov. The number of women using VA health care has doubled in the past ten years and is expected to double again in the next 5 years. The 30-second video was produced by the VA Women's Health Services office and addresses key issues addressed by Secretary Shinseki.

GOVERNOR CUOMO ANNOUNCES \$2.9 MILLION IN GRANTS TO SUPPORT NEW YORK STATE'S MILITARY INSTALLATIONS

NYS Military Bases Account for More than 10,000 Jobs and Nearly \$2 Billion in Economic Impact

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced that \$2.9 million in grants have been awarded to help local municipalities and community organizations support and strengthen New York's military installations in the face of looming defense cuts in Congress.

The Military Base Retention grants are a part of the state's efforts to safeguard New York's National Guard capabilities in the wake of Hurricane Sandy and to protect the economic and employment opportunities that major military facilities provide across the state. Service members from each of New York's air bases were deployed during Hurricane Sandy.

"New York's military installations are a major driver of local economies, and we will fight to keep these bases strong and secure, right here in our state," Governor Cuomo said. "Throughout Hurricane Sandy and in the storm's aftermath, we saw time and time again our military personnel on the front line, helping residents, keeping our streets safe, and providing critical supplies to those in need. These grants will help communities across New York State join the state's efforts to preserve these important military installations as well as the thousands of jobs and the nearly \$2 billion in economic impact supported by the bases."

New York State's military installations continue to be threatened by federal budgetary constraints. The grants announced today will help promote, enhance and protect New York's bases. State military bases account for more than 10,000 direct jobs with direct wages of \$688 million and \$1.9 billion of economic impact.

"Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, we are using every tool possible to ensure that our military bases which are so vital to the security of our nation and the strength of our local economies stay here and grow here," said Empire State Development President, CEO & Commissioner Kenneth Adams. "These grants will help protect our military installations from threats of closure and preserve a critical source of jobs and economic activity."

COLA Passes Senate:

A 1.7 percent increase will affect VA compensation for disabled veterans and surviving spouses effective December 1, 2012. Since benefits are paid retroactively, the first check to reflect the increase is due on or about January 1, 2013.

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DOD lends staff to VA to address claims backlog

By LEO SHANE III, Stars and Stripes, December 6, 2012

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department is developing more in-depth exit physicals for departing troops and lending staff to the Department of Veterans Affairs in an effort to help eliminate the massive backlog of disability claims.

VA Secretary Eric Shinseki said those efforts, combined with earlier department initiatives to create express service for simple claims and highly trained processing teams for complex ones, will help ease the problem in 2013 and keep the agency on track to *eliminate the backlog by the end of 2015*. Progress on that promise has been slow.

Since July, when the new processing protocols were implemented, the number of disability claims pending for more than 125 days has remained stagnant, at nearly 600,000 cases. In fiscal 2012, the average VA pension or compensation claim took more than 260 days to complete.

In a news conference Thursday, Shinseki acknowledged that “veterans still wait too long for the benefits they deserve,” but he insisted that the department is on the right track to fix the problem.

The joint DOD-VA announcements came after Shinseki and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta held their latest meeting on improving collaboration between the two departments. Panetta listed the backlog as a key concern not just of the VA, but also of his department.

“We owe it to them to give them the tools they need to succeed,” he said. “In many ways, this is a national security issue. It goes to the heart of taking care of the people who fought for us.”

In recent years, the agencies have worked closely to develop plans for lifetime electronic health records for troops and veterans, shared medical facilities, and better mental health research and response. The VA and DOD in recent months have been developing a transition program for separating service members, which should be fully implemented in early 2013.

The two secretaries also said they’re working on new joint suicide prevention efforts and that they have ordered their staffs to find ways to accelerate the lifetime health records integration faster than the 2017 target.

Those plans should relieve some of the stress on VA systems as thousands of new veterans leave the military in coming years. Currently, the 1 million claims processed by the VA annually aren’t keeping up with the 1-million-plus new cases being filed.

“We will get control of the numbers,” Shinseki said. “We have both short term and long term solutions.”

Defense officials did not provide specifics on the number of military employees assisting with VA processing, or what the more thorough exit physicals will entail.

Panetta and Shinseki said better medical information on veterans before they leave the military will simplify claims later on, hopefully speeding up the process.

VA officials said the extra information will be especially helpful with severely wounded service members, who often have multiple injuries and much more complicated paperwork.